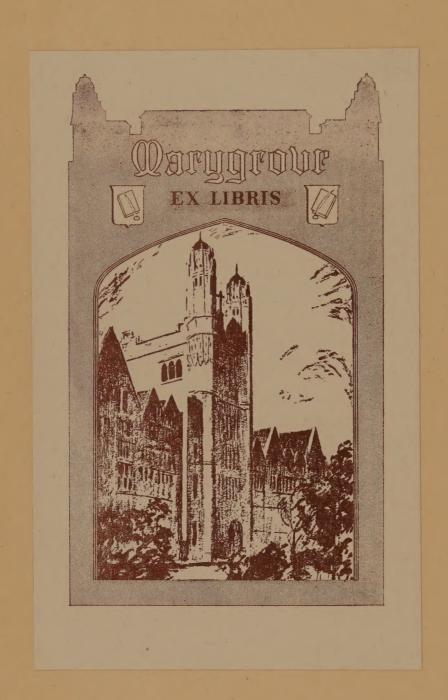
THE DETROIT INSTITUTE OF ARTS











THE DETROIT INSTITUTE OF ARTS

THE ARCHITECTURE



SEAL OF THE CITY OF DETROIT

Leon Hermant, Sculptor

Published for THE DETROIT INSTITUTE OF ARTS 1928



THE ARTS COMMISSION OF THE CITY OF DETROIT

RALPH H. BOOTH

President

WILLIAM J. GRAY

ALBERT KAHN

EDSEL B. FORD



W. R. VALENTINER

Art Director

CLYDE H. BURROUGHS

Secretary



THE CONSTRUCTION OF THE DETROIT INSTITUTE OF ARTS

STARTED ON JUNE 26, 1922

THE BUILDING WAS DEDICATED OCTOBER 7, 1927



PAUL PHILIPPE CRET ZANTZINGER, BORIE AND MEDARY

Associated Architects

THE BUILDERS WERE MESSRS. BRYANT AND DETWILER

The advice and suggestions of

DR. W. R. VALENTINER
DIRECTOR OF THE MUSEUM AND OF THE STAFF
OF THE OFFICES OF MR. ALBERT KAHN
AND OF MR. C. HOWARD CRANE, OF DETROIT

were of the greatest value in the preparation of the plans and during the construction



THE DETROIT INSTITUTE OF ARTS

WITH the first inception of the purpose to build an art museum in the city of Detroit, arose the intention of making the building primarily a place to which men and women and children would come for rest and for the enjoyment of beautiful and vital things. This purpose was maintained as the dominant principle of the building, which, after a work of seven years, was opened to the public on October 7, 1927. As it stands completed, the inscription above the entrance reads that it is "dedicated by the people of Detroit to the knowledge and enjoyment of art."

There is a freshness of suggestion in the simple statement; an intimation, perhaps, of the profound understanding of pleasure which was one of the brightest facets of the wisdom of the Greeks. Art, to be understood, must first be enjoyed, for unless it is enjoyed, it can never be fully understood, and if it is the source of delight and refreshment, it has achieved its purpose, and confers understanding rather than demands it. But again, as the knowledge of it increases, the pleasure of it deepens and broadens out, quickening through the whole field of imagination and emotion, and awakening a man to an acute and exquisite consciousness of life.

The two principles of artistic education, therefore, are so closely allied that they must be sought as a single entity. The institution designed to promote a "knowledge" of art fails in its purpose if it chills and overshadows the enjoyment of artistic masterpieces, and fails no less in its aim of giving pleasure, if the order of its arrangement tends to leave in the mind of the visitor no clear impression of some definite relationship among the things that he has seen.

The Arts Commission for the Detroit Institute had formulated these ideas before 1920, and after considering various architects who might best carry out their purposes, appointed Dr. Paul P. Cret, Professor of Architecture at the University of Pennsylvania, and designer of the Indianapolis Public Library and the Pan-American Building at Washington, as architect for the projected museum. Associated with Dr. Cret were the Philadelphia architects, Zantzinger, Borie and Medary.

A careful study of existing museums, both in America and Europe, showed that the best-known museums fall into two groups. In the first, are the old palaces and houses which the shufflings of public and private vicissitudes have brought into the possession of national or municipal governments. In this group are to be found, for instance, the Louvre, the Carnavalet and the Cluny in Paris, and many others in the provinces of France; the Vatican in Rome, the Brera at

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Milan, the Uffizi and Pitti palaces in Florence, and others in Spain, Flanders and Germany. None of these old buildings was designed as a museum, and except for changes in interior made to accommodate the exhibition galleries, each has been left in its original state, with the glamor of its histories about it, and its architectural beauty still intact.

In the second group are the museums, dating from the beginning of the nine-teenth century, which were specially designed and built for their purpose, according to what have been generally regarded as the soundest principles of museum-planning. In this group fall such well-known examples as the British Museum, the National Gallery, the Kaiser Friedrich, the Museum of Vienna, and finally all the American museums. In these buildings, the arrangements generally adopted was the so-called "box system" of rooms. But, as Dr. Cret points out, "the nineteenth century architect was too often satisfied with determining the proportion of an exhibition room, the size of its skylight in relation to its area, and the color of its bare walls, and then repeating this unit ten, twenty or forty times, throwing in, for art's sake, a monumental stairway and a monumental lobby . . . and there was a Museum!" This system was regarded as having all the virtues of efficiency, and the fact that it was fatiguing and depressing was waived aside as though it had no relation whatever to the fundamental purposes of a Museum of Art.

When the Boston Museum of Fine Arts was undertaken, the Commission that was sent abroad to study the most famous of the European galleries, reported that in spite of the care that had been taken in developing the efficiency of the modern buildings, the old Italian palaces were far more pleasant to visit, and afforded more agreeable and interesting backgrounds for the works of art exhibited in them. In their rooms, paintings, sculpture and furniture were seen in their natural relationships, and in their natural settings. The architecture in itself was full of interest, and the decoration and arrangement of the rooms attracted the visitor to explore the unexpected vistas that opened to him in constant variety. In works of art seen and enjoyed under these conditions as opposed to their display in the painstaking arrangements developed in the modern museum, there is, as Dr. Cret remarks, much the same difference that "we feel between the plants and birds seen in a garden, and these same plants and birds in the glass cases of a botanical or zoological collection."

The conclusion drawn from these reports was that the modern museum left much to be desired, and that there were features of the old which were worthy of careful study.

When the design of the Detroit Institute of Arts was undertaken, the



defects and virtues of both types of museums were minutely considered. Every problem of plan, lighting, material and decoration was studied with such exhaustive thoroughness that the total number of drawings made was upwards of 2,400, of which more than 800 were used as working drawings.

The plan as finally developed is noteworthy for the simplicity with which it solves the complicated problem of the requirements. A seventeenth century writer on mathematics speaks of the "elegance" of Pascal's famous pyramid formula, which reduces a chaos of ideas seemingly beyond the grasp of human reach, to a simplicity and order that yields to the comprehension of a 15-year-old child. There is something of this sort of "elegance" in the manner with which the basic plan of the Detroit Institute embraces all its requirements with complete ease and coherence.

This plan divides the building into a main floor providing for three large groupings of exhibits, (American, European and Asiatic, including those of classic antiquity); a lower floor containing the administration offices, studyrooms, print rooms, storage rooms, a library, a lecture hall, etc.; a third floor, covering only a portion of the area occupied by the other two; and finally, a theatre, which, though a complete unit in itself, with a seating capacity of 1,200, is nevertheless an integral part of the building.

The important exhibitions are displayed on the main floor, and for ordinary purposes, it is to this floor alone that the visitor confines himself. For this reason, the general effect of the building is that of a one-story structure, and this effect is clearly emphasized in the design of the facade. The exterior surfaces of the building bear the same organic relationship to the interior planning, as the surfaces of a beautifully articulated body bear to its underlying structure of bone and muscle.

The marble facade has been carried out in a modification of the Italian Renaissance style, to harmonize with the public library which stands opposite, and to compose with it a unit of civic architecture. There is a sort of Mediterranean warmth in the classic simplicity of the elevations, a smiling serenity rather than austerity, which suggests an invitation to the free, happy, spontaneous enjoyment of beautiful things. Yet there is no evidence of any deliberate appeal to wonder and admiration. Except for the bronze statues in the niches at the ends of the two wings, and the bronze replicas of river gods from the garden of Versailles, which stand to right and left of the entrance, the decoration is confined almost entirely to the accenting of structural features, such as the keystones of the arches, string-courses, and grilles of handwrought iron at the three entrance doors.

The rear elevation of the building shows the same confidence in the eloquence of simple and beautiful proportions, and again the outward form clearly expresses



the character of the interior that it clothes. The smooth, broad planes that denote the wall of the theatre are ornamented only by the development of a single doorway, with sculptured motives by Leon Hermant, and by the line of a balustrade descending at right and left in a curving stairway, which leads from the balcony exits of the theatre to the level of the ground. The firm, logical plan of the interior, fulfilling all its requirements without effort or confusion, thus reaches its final expression in the quiet, sunny surfaces of the exterior.

Upon entering the building, the first impression is one of noble spaces, of air and color and beautiful varieties of light. The entrance vista, instead of being blocked by the traditional monumental stairway, which produces a chilling, crushing effect, is modulated by a series of shallow steps, separated by long intervals, and making a gradual ascent from the first floor level to that of the main floor, without contradicting the one-story effect of the facade. The lighting of this vista ascends in the same gradual crescendo, from the cool shadow of the entrance hall, to the rich, colorful brightness of the main hall, and finally to the sparkling, sunny glimpses of the indoor garden.

The exhibition rooms lie in the wings to the right and left of the central axis, and around the indoor garden at the foot of it, so that they can be entered either from the entrance hall, the main hall, or from the indoor garden. This arrangement provides a perfect circulation system, and obviates the monotony of a constant return to a single pivotal point.

The architectural development of the three central rooms on the main axis, varies from the classicism of the entrance hall, with its Ionic columns and arches, to the informal warmth and brightness of the garden. The transition is made through the main hall, where the grandeur of lofty proportions is warmed by the sunlight streaming through high fenestrations, and by the rich coloring of the painted vault. This hall not only provides for large receptions, such as at the opening of annual exhibitions, but also affords the spacious proportions necessary for the display of large tapestries and monumental sculpture. Its general design, carried out on a superb scale, is in the spirit of the larger interiors of Pompeii.

A gate, in itself a masterpiece of wrought ironwork, leads through the arch at the rear of the main hall to the indoor garden, where the fountain, with its banks of growing plants and its blue tiled pools of gold fish, plays in a flood of sunlight. In this charming place the visitor can rest after a tour of the exhibition rooms. In the corners are little iron chairs and tables like those in the boulevard cafes of Europe, and the sunlight is softened by an orange colored awning with a blue border, which, hung loosely, stretches from the cross-beams of the ceiling. The architecture is a free adaptation of the Italian baroque, with walls of mellow-



hued travertino stone, decorated with sculptured motives on the borders, arched niches for statuary and the colored tilework of the drinking fountains. The opening at the rear frames an interesting composition with the line of the stairway, accented by a delicate iron balustrade, rising over the entrance to the theatre to the loggia of the third floor level. This opening leads into a cross-corridor connecting the exhibition rooms that lie to right and left. Thus, the indoor garden provides a resting place midway in the full circuit of the exhibition rooms.

As has been said, the purpose that was sought in the design of the Institute was that of increasing the enjoyment of objects of art by presenting them in such a way that the visitor would form clear impressions not only of their intrinsic beauty, but also of their relationship to the life of the civilizations that produced them. To attain this end, much thought was given to the decoration and arrangement of the exhibition rooms, to the most satisfactory conditions of lighting, and to the order in which the works of art should be displayed.

In the typical museum of the nineteenth century, it was customary to divide the exhibits into groups that classified them simply according to kind,—i. e., painting, sculpture, furniture, etc.,—without regard for what might be called their liferelationships. The backgrounds were always neutral, and pictures, wall-hangings and household articles, which at one time might have furnished the room of a private dwelling, were separated from one another and presented to the public coldly in a lifeless collection of other objects of the same kind.

Seeing them under such conditions, no one, unless he were equipped with both erudition and the liveliest imagination, could restore them mentally to the surroundings from which they had been taken, and it was inevitable that, shorn of a living background, they should lose much of their character and distinction, and become simply numbered pieces of a museum collection.

The system adopted at the Detroit Institute groups the exhibits, not according to kind, but according to the historical times to which they belong, and displays them against architectural backgrounds which reproduce the spirit of their native settings. Thus, pictures, furniture, pottery, hangings and statuary are arranged in a natural relationship to each other in the exhibition rooms, gaining immeasurably in interest and vitality from the harmonizing atmosphere of the architectural treatment.

The decoration of these period rooms is full of beauty and originality. Instead of being a pedantic imitation, it shows an artist's adaptation of the significant characteristics of old architectural forms, that seems rather to evoke the vital spirit of a past age than to give a mere effigy of its outward features. Only one or two original interiors have been installed as exhibition rooms, such as the French, the American



colonial, and the Gothic Chapel from the Chateau de Lannoy in Lorraine, which has been skillfully incorporated with the Gothic Hall. The other rooms, English, Greek, Northern Baroque, etc., are part of the building itself. In such rooms as the Early Christian, Gothic, Italian Renaissance, etc., where the dominant architectural characteristics sought for were strongly marked, the problem of setting was simple in comparison to that presented by the backgrounds of earlier civilizations whose architectural features were less sharply pronounced, or, if fully developed, tended to interfere with the display of the exhibits; yet the means used to describe the character of Japanese or Chinese, African or Aztec settings are as simple as they are vivid. The series of Period-rooms, with their variety of architectural interest, follows a logical time-order connecting the art of one age to that of another, so that the visitor, traversing the entire main floor without confusion, obtains a clear impression not only of the native architectural background of a particular object, but also of the influences which the art of one age borrowed from the age that preceded it, and exercised upon the artistic development of the one following.

In the European section, for instance, one proceeds from the art of the nine-teenth century through rooms devoted to eighteenth century English and French art, then through the Northern and Southern Baroque galleries with which this art is closely related, and then to the galleries of the Italian Renaissance. These galleries in turn connect with the Gothic, Romanesque and early Christian rooms, through which a transition is made to the classic art of Rome and Greece. The connecting link between the European and Asiatic sections is the Egyptian gallery, whose art is related on one hand to the early Greek art and on the other to that of Mesopotamia. In a similar manner the transition from the Asiatic wing to the American is made by way of the art of the Aztecs and Peruvians who are now believed to have an artistic connection with the Orient through the islands of the Pacific. Thus the history of art is unfolded vividly and coherently, in such a way as to leave a clear and lasting impression.

Viewed as a feature of museum-planning, this constant variation of back-ground produces the psychological effect which is one of the greatest charms of the old European galleries. A visitor at the Detroit Institute finds himself drawn on from room to room by interesting and colorful vistas. The physical fatigue caused by monotonous stretches of wood or stone under foot, is obviated by the alternation of materials and designs used in the flooring of adjoining rooms. The eyes are rested by the variety of colors in which the walls are clothed, and the mind stimulated by constant architectural surprises. Again, instead of walls and cases filled with objects in such profusion that the spectator grows weary at the very sight of the task that awaits him, one finds the exhibits so arranged that each thing can be con-



templated without the interfering consciousness of other objects crowding densely about it. The arrangements of exhibits—the work of the director and his staff—is, in fact, noteworthy, and shows an admirable appreciation of the possibilities afforded by the settings.

The use of window-lighting has been adopted almost entirely throughout the museum, in recognition of psychological laws to which everyone responds consciously or unconsciously. Certainly, every normally constituted human being is sensitive in some degree to the effect of light; the monotony of a grey day depresses the spirits; a sunny day with its inflections of light and shadow revives and stimulates them; and the constant droning of a single color-tone through room after room of a building, will produce in time almost the same degree of weariness, if not of nervous irritation, as would the unvarying repetition of a single note on a bagpipe or a piano. While the display of pictures and sculpture under a standard uniform light may be theoretically desirable, the effect in time grows monotonous and depressing. The problem of lighting is, in fact, one of the most troublesome, and the supporters of window-lighting, artificial-lighting and skylight illumination are about equal in number and authority. But, as Mr. Cret has said, "the skylight, though useful and even unavoidable in some cases, is never agreeable. We have in a little time the impression of being drowned in the bottom of an aquarium, in a light that has lost all warmth of coloration by filtering through the dusty glass."

At the Detroit Institute, therefore, Mr. Cret has employed skylight illumination only in the temporary-exhibition rooms which lie in the center of the American wing, and two other rooms. In all the period-rooms of the European and Oriental sections, and in the two large rooms for the exhibition of Modern painting, window-lighting is used with such skill and sensitiveness to its possibilities for striking effect, that it adds materially to the interest of the collections.

The outdoor court of the European section, like the indoor garden, is a place where the visitor may refresh himself with a few minutes of relaxation, this time in the open air. Lying so that it forms a nucleus around which the main exhibition galleries of the European section are grouped, it is architecturally one of the most interesting features of the Institute in its satisfying and delightful solution of a difficult problem. The difficulty lay in the necessity of harmonizing the four walls of the court in such a way that each would be a logical exterior portion of the period room within, and yet complete a unit with the three other walls to form a background for outdoor exhibits. This has been done by the employment of characteristic fenestration in the window-openings of the period-rooms, while the surfaces of the four walls are treated alike in brickwork. Thus the wall on the side of the Gothic Hall shows the pointed arches of the Gothic windows and the bay of the



little fifteenth century chapel. The wall of the Italian Renaissance Galleries has the fenestration of the Renaissance style, and an outside staircase suggesting that of the Bargello palace (which connects the court with the galleries), while the wall of the Northern Baroque section expresses its relation to its interior by the bay of a Flemish window. These architectural themes are woven so deftly into the common background of brick that the effect of unity is attained to furnish an appropriate setting for such exhibits as the Roman columns and sarcophagi, and the fifteenth century well-heads of Venetian Gothic design.

In the left wing of the building, the rooms for temporary exhibitions correspond in their relative position to the outdoor court in the European wing. These, though an important requirement in a modern museum, are something in the nature of an innovation. In other museums, such exhibitions are usually given in the rooms of the permanent exhibits, which necessitates the transference of valuable objects to the store rooms, at the risk of damage. At the Detroit Institute the three rooms are always in reserve, and may be closed off while paintings are being hung, without interrupting any of the normal activities of the museum. The decorations of these rooms, as of the large galleries for permanent exhibitions of Modern Art, are uniformly modern in character, but the patterning of the floors, the decorative motives in the borders of the ceilings and the coloring of the wall coverings, differ from room to room and the effect is always rich in simple variations.

In the design of the rooms where examples of mid-eighteenth century and early nineteenth century American Art are shown, the background again provides the historical setting. For the installation of the original interior of Whitby Hall, a Colonial mansion, built in 1754 by Colonel James Coultas, the windows and shutters of the original facade—the only portion remaining of the exterior—have been incorporated in the new facade, which shows the characteristic architecture of the time.

The plan of the lower floor is as carefully adapted to its requirements as is the main floor. In the right wing, the library, the print rooms, study rooms and tearoom, and the Northern Romanesque gallery are grouped around the level of the outdoor court, while in the left wing under the American galleries, provision is made for the textile collection, and the administration offices. In this wing there is a delightful little auditorium for lectures or small musicales, finely proportioned and full of color, with its windows balustraded in iron work painted red, and its seats upholstered in orange-red leather.

Under the main hall, there is a second large exhibition hall, while the storage rooms are below the indoor garden. These are so arranged that deliveries can be



made to them directly at a minimum risk of damage, either for storage or to be lifted in elevators to the exhibition galleries on the main floor.

The third floor, above the indoor garden and surrounding it, provides on one side, rooms for the staff photographer, retouching rooms, and studios for artists working on copies or on special research work. On the other side is a series of five connecting rooms designed for exhibitions of ultra-modern art. These are clearly lighted and well proportioned, and have been left bare of decoration in order to provide a background preserving strict neutrality with any tendency.

The theatre, which is large enough to accommodate the Detroit Symphony Orchestra or a complete theatrical production, lies behind the indoor garden, the long axis of the auditorium extending at right angles to the central axis of the museum. The main entrance is on the level of the main floor and connected with it by the arched doorway which opens upon the indoor garden.

Both in plan and decoration, the theatre seems to leave nothing to be desired. Every requirement fits smoothly into its place, and the architectural treatment is an expression of the spirit of the play-house in its truest interpretation.

From the entrance vestibule, which charms the eye with its classic simplicity, one enters the lower promenade, and either proceeds to the orchestra floor of the auditorium or ascends to the foyer on the balcony level.

The design and colored tilework of the drinking fountains, the delicately painted mouldings of the ceiling decorations, and the colored tilework repeated in the rising of the stair-steps, break through the restraint of the general treatment of the lower promenade, and prepare the transition to the stately brilliance of the foyer.

Here, the mood of gala-dress is carried out in lofty mirrors reflecting the proportions of the hall in infinite perspectives, in the Italian ceiling, the polished floor and the high arched windows framed in painted and moulded ornament. The proximity of the indoor garden is not suspected, but the doorway opening from the cross-corridor on the right of the foyer leads directly into its cool spaces, where, between the acts of a play or in the intermission of an orchestra concert, one may enjoy the freshness and quiet of its tranquil mood.

The auditorium, though warm with color, is fundamentally simple and restrained in design. The ornamentation is limited to the employment of panelling and colored moulding on the walls and ceiling, and to the decorative treatment of various utilitarian features. The ventilators, for instance, around the upper borders of the walls, are screened behind beautifully finished sculptural motives, and the organ chamber and pipes, taking the place of the unsatisfactory proscenium boxes to right and left of the stage, are hidden by perforated grilles



of ornamental design. Analysis shows, therefore, that the brilliant effect of the whole has been attained by the simplest architectural means, and the result, with all its gay suggestions of the play-house, is reposeful and beautiful. The treatment of the exits, even, displays a striking originality, for, while those on the first floor level open in the coventional way to the street on one side, and into a loggia on the side of the museum, the balcony exits open, not onto a fire escape of iron or concrete, but upon the wide terrace which, with its balustrade and broad staircases, forms the dominant motif of the rear facade.

There is no straining for originality in any aspect of the building as, on the other hand, there is no trite handling of a problem. Not a fragment of ornament that is superfluous, or that has been finished without the utmost care. The details, studied by themselves, reveal as much delicacy in their workmanship as there is restraint in their design, and the result is summed up in a perfectly organized whole that awakens a memory of Sir Thomas Browne's lovely lucid words, "There is a music wherever there is a harmony, order and proportion . . ." This "music" that "gives no sound unto the ear yet to the understanding strikes a note most full of harmony," seems to pervade the calm yet vivid spaces of the building; which, suggesting nothing of the school, possesses the warmth, the grace and the completeness of a classic temple, where beauty can be venerated and loved as a happy god, diffusing knowledge through enjoyment, and increasing enjoyment through knowledge.

S. W.



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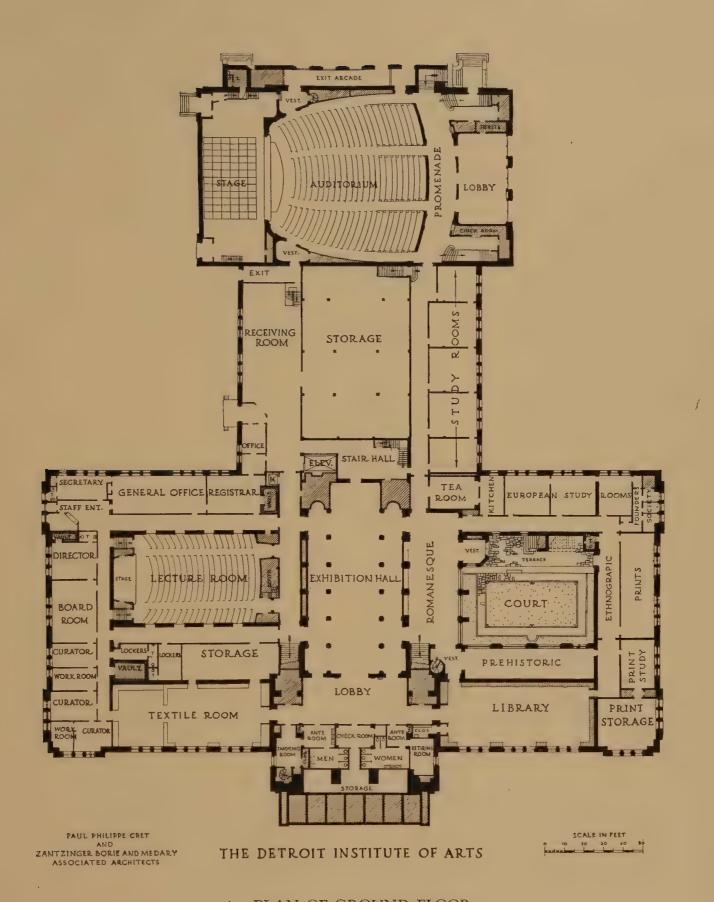


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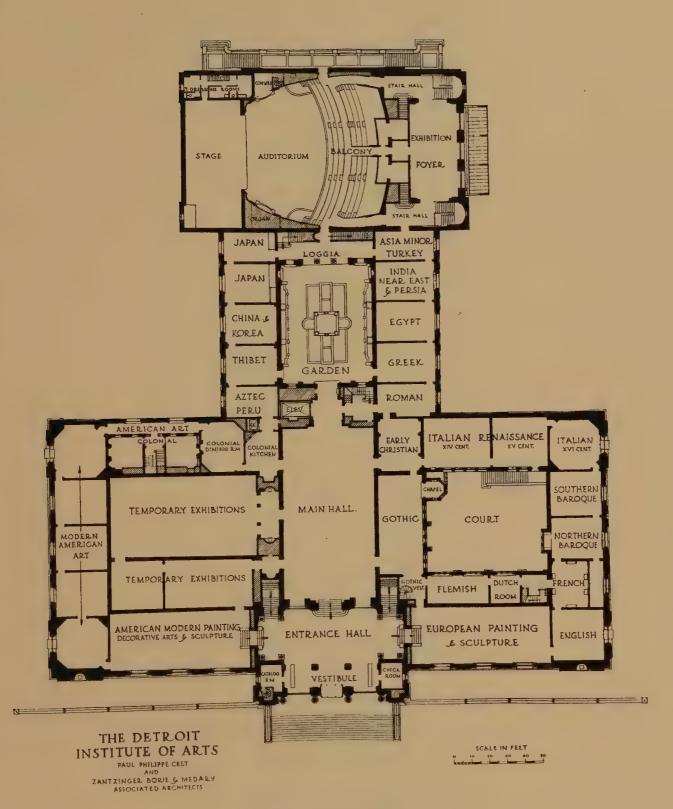
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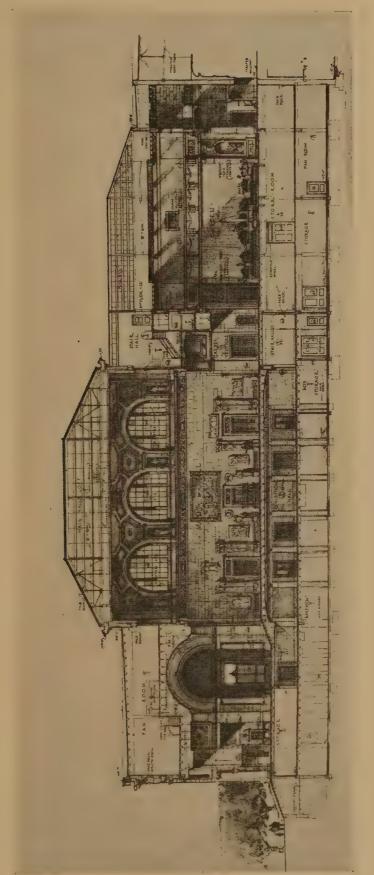
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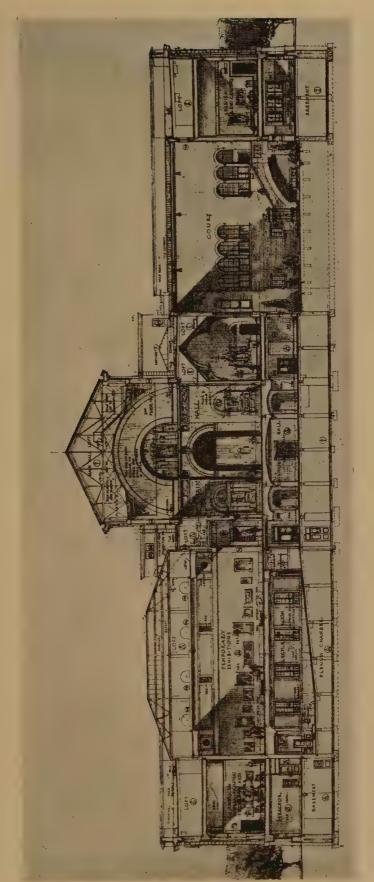
2. PLAN OF MAIN FLOOR





3. LONGITUDINAL SECTION





4. TRANSVERSE SECTION



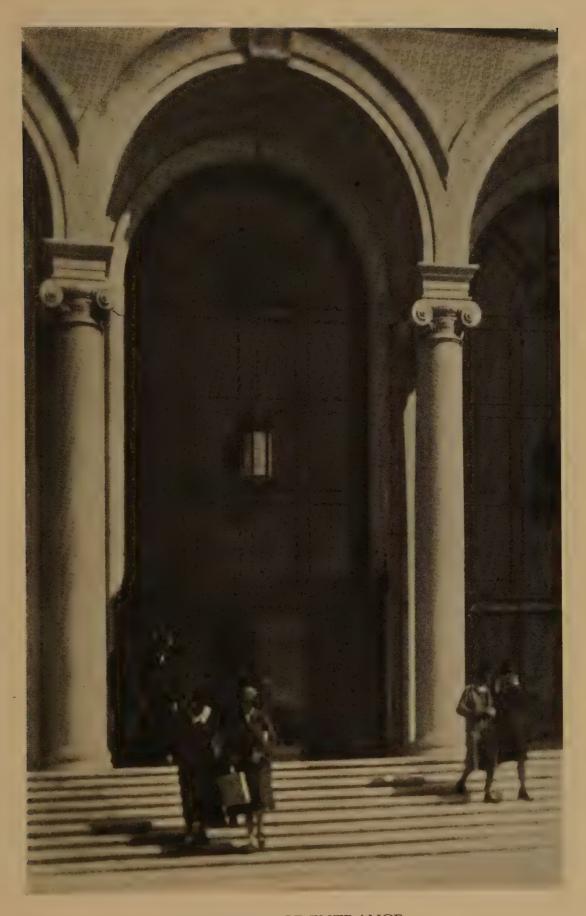


5. THE INSTITUTE OF ARTS FROM WOODWARD AVENUE



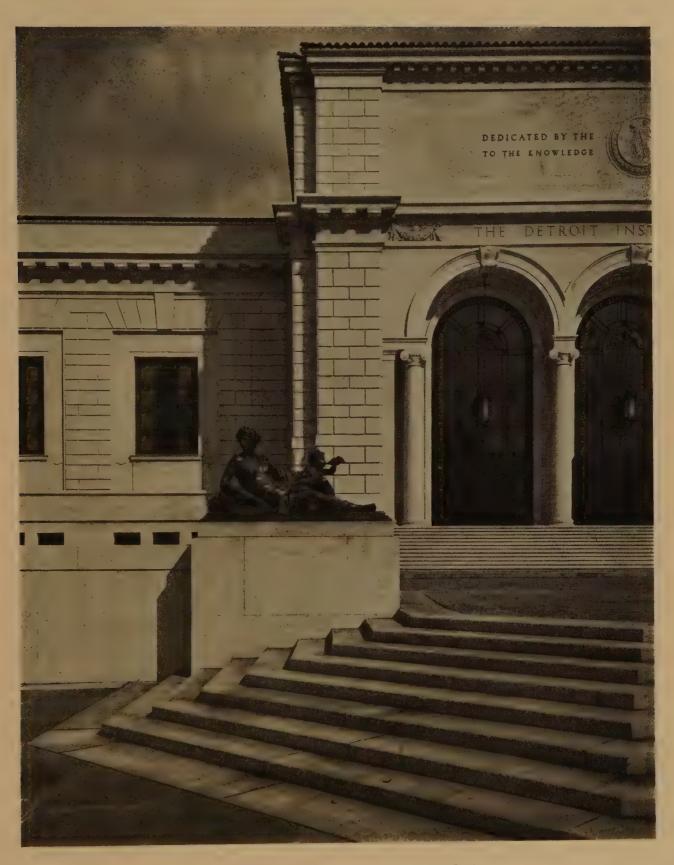
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15. DETAIL OF ENTRANCE VESTIBULE





16. DETAIL OF ENTRANCE VESTIBULE





17. MAIN HALL





18. MAIN HALL, LOOKING TOWARD GARDEN





19. MAIN HALL, LOOKING TOWARD ENTRANCE VESTIBULE





20. DETAIL OF MAIN HALL





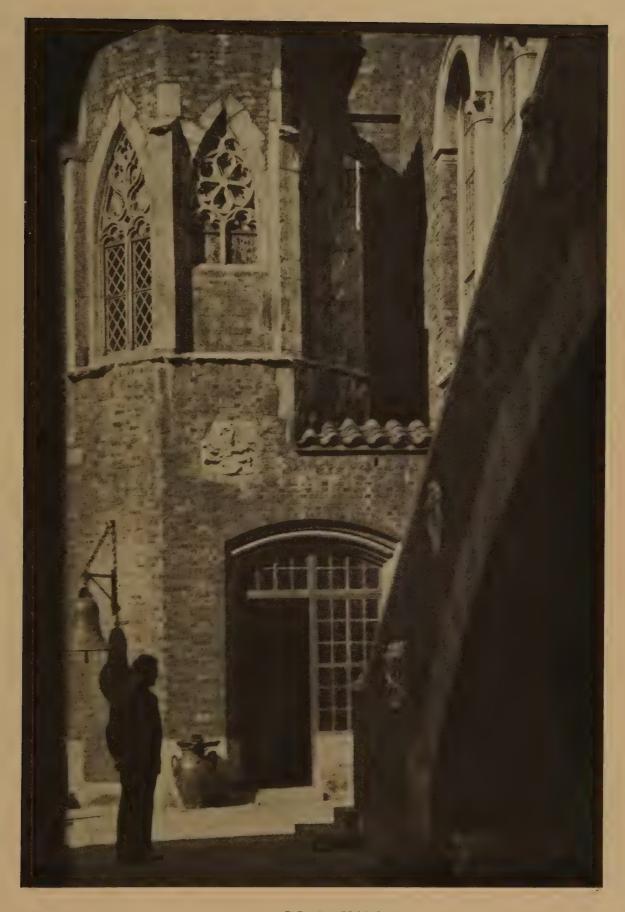
21. DRINKING FOUNTAIN





COURTYARD, BAY WINDOW OF NORTHERN BARROCO ROOM





23. COURTYARD





24. COURTYARD, STAIRS TO ITALIAN ROOMS





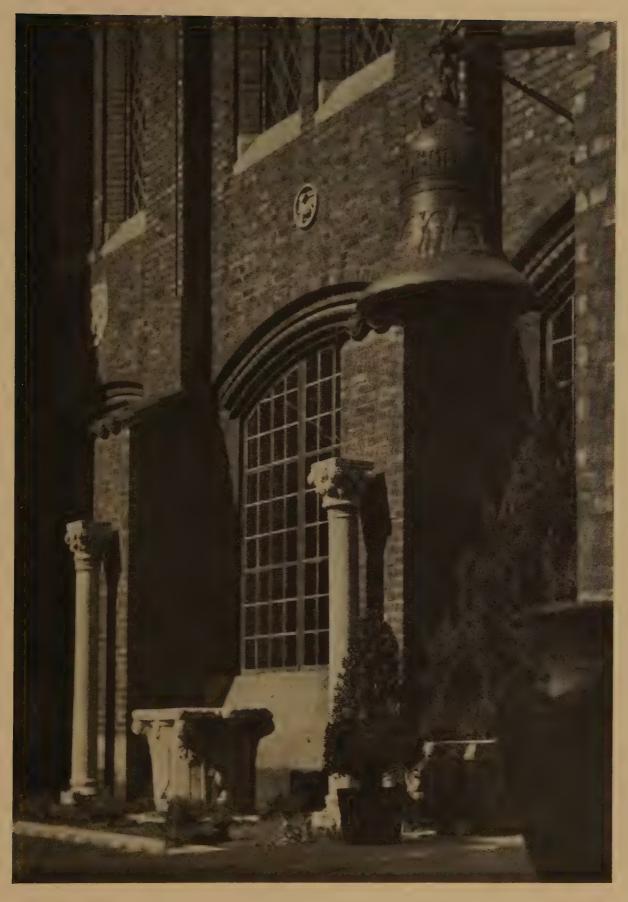
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29. DETAIL IN GARDEN





30. THE GARDEN POOL





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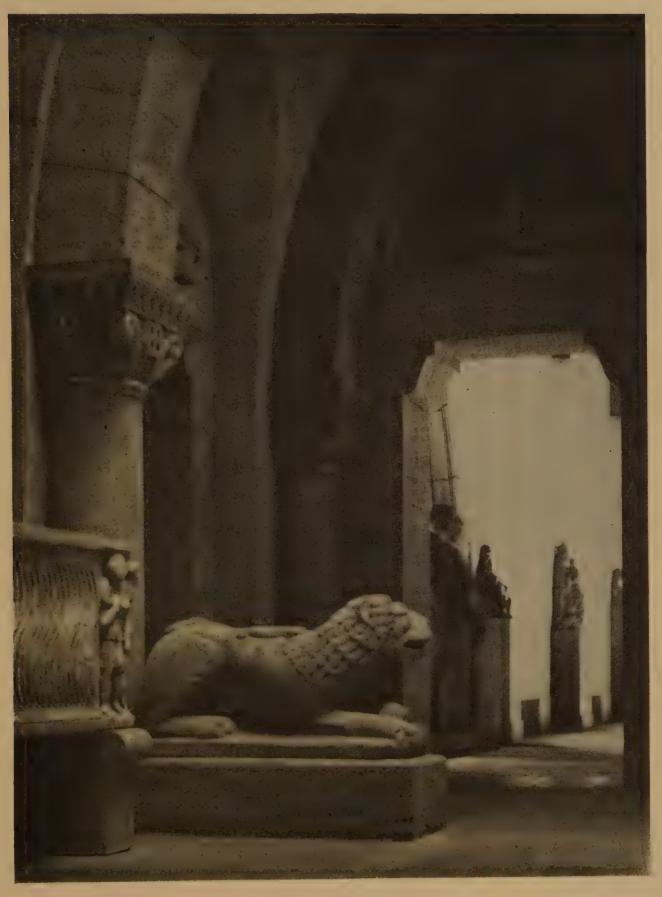
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35. GOTHIC ROOM





36. THE FRENCH GOTHIC CHAPEL





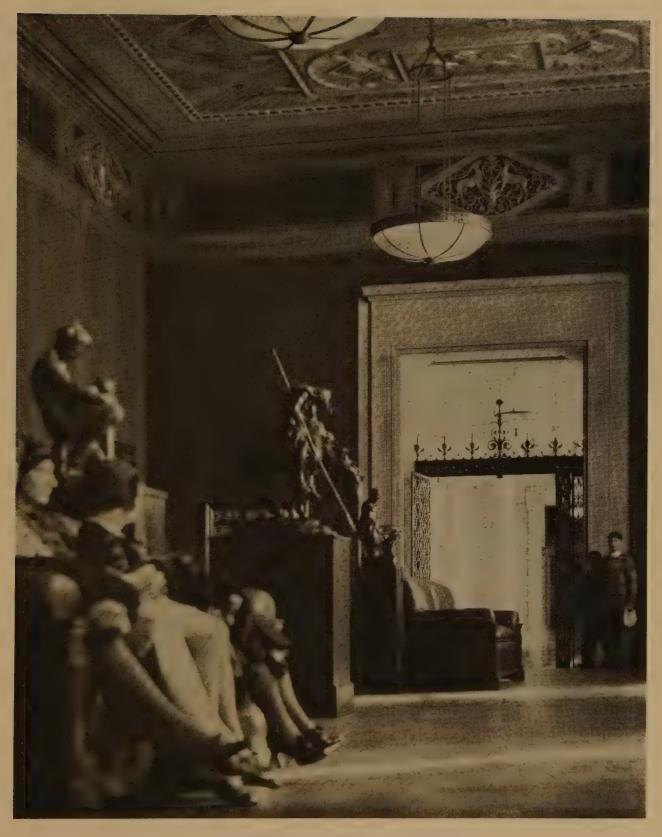
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39. MODERN AMERICAN ROOM





40. JAPANESE ROOM



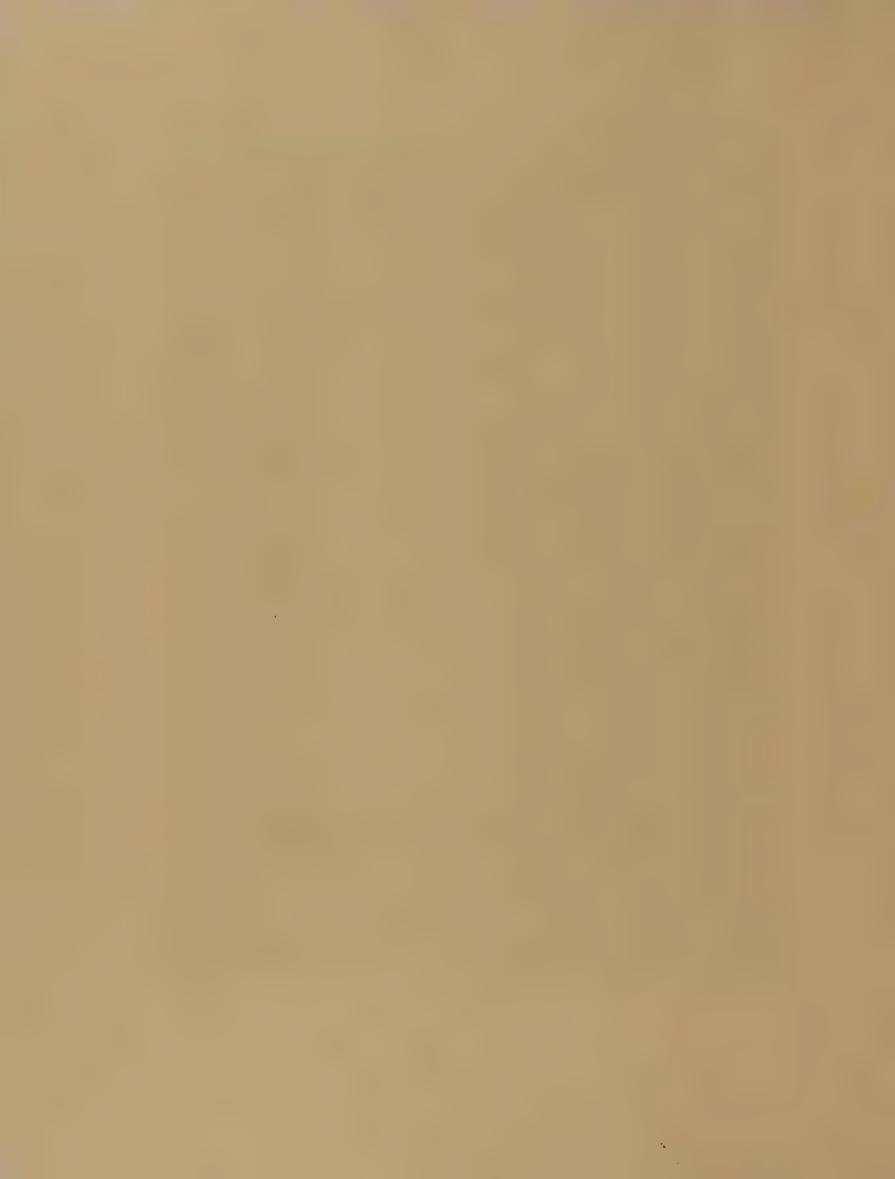


41. COLONIAL ROOM FROM WHITBY HALL



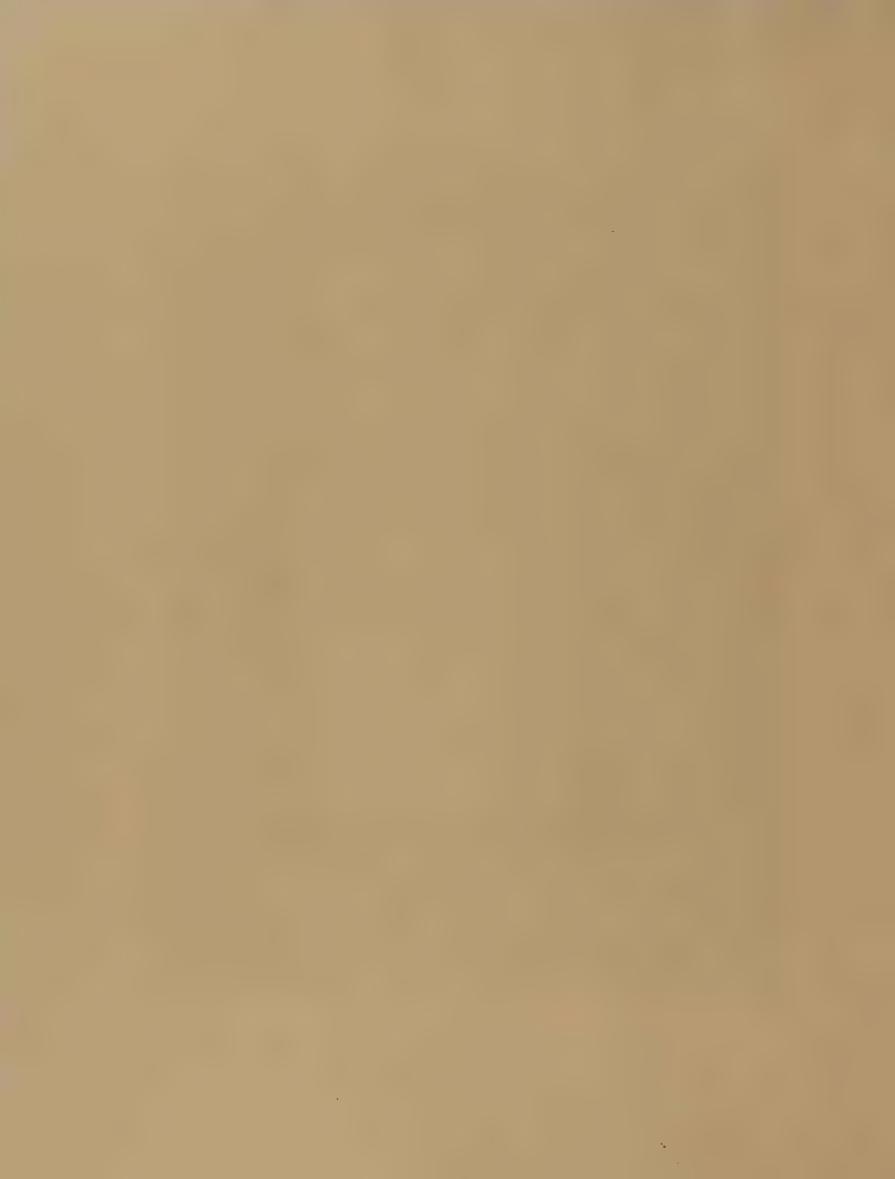


42. DUTCH ROOM





43. TEMPORARY EXHIBITIONS ROOM





44. GREEK ROOM





Date Due			
AD 26'48		/-	
MAY 2 5 '49			
MR 13 '66			
AP 2 7'72			
AP 25:73			
W 10 14			
SE 21.70 APR 16 2007	,		
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